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Novi Sad Day 1 wrap: Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan strike gold on opening day

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Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan divided the gold medals out between them as three events were decided on the opening day of the 20th European Athletics Junior Championships in the Serbian city of Novi Sad.

Hayle Ibrahimov of Azerbaijan surges ahead of the pack en route to winning the 10000m final on the first day of the European Athletics Junior Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia.

Arguably the most eye-catching of the trio of triumphs was Hayle Ibrahimov getting Azerbaijan's first ever victory in the championships, or even medal, since the country became independent in 1991.

The Ethiopian-born 19-year-old cruised to a 10000m win in a national junior record 30:06.64.

He imposed his supremacy just two kilometres into the race. After five laps in which the lead changed hands several times, Ibrahimov went to the front and subtly increased the pace.

By 4000m, the 17-man field had been reduced to a leading group of seven runners with Ibrahimov and Great Britain's Simon Lawson starting to put daylight between themselves and the rest of their rivals.

On the 11th and 12th laps, Ibrahimov then cranked up the pace as he tried to shake off Lawson and eventually succeeded, going through the halfway mark in 15:08.35.

Ibrahimov reached the 6000m mark in 17:59.61 with Lawson second, 12 seconds in arrears. The gap stretched another four seconds in the next kilometre and was almost 19 seconds at 8000m.

However, Lawson held his form despite Ibrahimov continuing to disappear into the distance to get Britain's first ever medal at the event in 30:35.62.

"On the day he was by far the better runner. I'd thought about taking it out from the start but I'd also seen the times he (Ibrahimov) had done over 3000m and 5000m and decided to change my plans," reflected Lawson, taking a view that he didn't want to blow up in the heat, which was still over 30 degrees in the early evening as the gun went for the runners to commence running over 25 laps of the track.

Belarus' Siarhei Platonau pulled away from Britain's Dewi Griffiths with four laps to go to take the bronze in 30:55.92.

Hryshko takes Shot Put gold

Platonau will have been spurred on by hearing his country's national anthem played during the race for the victory ceremony to celebrate Aliona Hryshko's win in the women's Shot Put.

Hryshko, the 2007 World Youth Championships gold medallist, went into the final more than a metre better than her rivals on the basis of her personal best of 17.95m that she produced to win her national junior title last month and so another title was effectively hers when she sent the Shot out to 17.39m in the opening round.

However, she saved her best for last.

She followed up her initial effort with three fouls as she aimed to go over the 18-metre mark for the first time in her career. Her fifth-round 16.94m was still significantly better than anybody else could manage and then, with the gold medal already confirmed, she capped her series with 17.59m.

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Germany took the other two medals with Samira Burkhardt taking the silver with her final-round 16.46m.

Burkhardt's second place was never seriously threatened as she had four other throws over 16 metres. Her compatriot Sophie Kleeberg was third with 15.95m.

Aliona Hryshko of Belarus won the Shot Put title with a massive throw of 17.59m.

Alembekova wins 10km Walk

Earlier in the day, Russia's Elmira Alembekova won the women's 10000m Walk in 46:31.07, taking the lead from the gun and never relinquishing it to clinch the first gold of the championships.

She notched up Russia's fifth consecutive victory at the event. In fact, no other country has stood on top of the medal podium since the discipline's distance was lengthened from 5000m to 10000m in 2001.

"I finished 20 seconds behind my fellow Russian Tatyana Mineyeva at the world juniors last year and she would have been the favourite but she had to withdraw a few days ago with a bad throat infection. I knew it was my big chance and I wasn't going to let it go so I decided to walk fast from the start even though it was very hot," said the diminutive Alembekova.

She held a seven-second lead over her compatriot Nina Okhotnikova at the 4000m mark. Alembekova then passed the halfway point in 22:48.33 and gradually increased her lead as she circled the track.

With six laps to go, her advantage over Okhotnikova was exactly the length of the home straight, although the heat was starting to take its toll even on the leader as her lap speed started to slightly decrease.

Okhotnikova, who was to finish third, wilted in the final three laps as Italy's Antonella Palmisano walked an excellent second half of the race to overtake her Russian rival just after the bell and take the silver medal in 46:59.47.

Van der Plaetsen leads Decathlon

Belgium's Thomas van der Plaetsen is aiming to become Belgium's first European junior champion in the Decathlon and leads after the first day's five events with 4137 points, notching up personal bests in every single discipline. Great Britain's Daniel Gardiner lies second at the halfway stage with 4070 points.

Otherwise, Thursday was mainly a day for preliminary rounds and qualifying competitions.

Germany's Yasmin Kwadwo was the fastest women in the morning's 100m first round with 11.69 and slightly moved up a gear to become the fastest semi-finalist in 11.61. Norway's Folake Akinyemi won her semi in 11.66.

In similar fashion to Kwadwo, French sprinter Christophe Lemaître eased through the first round in the best time of 10.44 and then impressed as the fastest qualifier for Friday's final by clocking 10.26 in his semi.

Great Britain's Chris Clarke, the 400m bronze medallist 12 months ago at the World Junior Championships, was the only man under 47 seconds when he won the first semi-final over one lap of the track in 46.71.

Folake Akinyemi of Norway cruises through to clock 11.66s in the 100m semifinals.

"That felt good, I wasn't even tiring. I'll be very disappointed if I don't come away with a big PB in the final," said a confident Clarke.

Baraley starts well

Ukraine's Yuliya Baraley confirmed her status as the big favourite for the women's 400m by cruising to an easy first-round win in 53.16, over half-a-second better than Russia's Liliya Gafiyatullina, the next best qualifier for Friday's final in a personal best of 53.72.

France's Bryan Cantero ran a personal best by nearly two seconds to lead the men's 1500m qualifiers for Saturday's final but Spain's David Bustos, the fastest European teenager this year, looked ominously comfortable when jogging home in second place behind Cantero in the second semifinal in 3:46.23.

Grøvdal in the groove

Norway's reigning European junior 3000m steeplechase champion and European junior record holder Karoline Bjerkeli Grøvdal looks a good bet to defend her title after she cruised to a 10:00.44 win in her semi-final, winning by 150 metres. Azerbaijan's Layes Abullayeva took the second semi-final in a national record 10:18.07.

Russia's Alexsey Fydorov, the 2007 World Youth Championships men's Triple Jump silver medallist, has jumped 16.62m this

season, almost half-a-metre further than anybody else, and confirmed his status as the clear favourite for the gold medal by only needing one jump of 16.55m to secure his place in Friday's final.

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